

**City of Reading
City Council
Work Session
Monday, December 19, 2011**

Councilors Attending: V. Spencer, F. Acosta, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou, D. Reed, D. Sterner, J. Waltman

Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer, C. Geffken, C. Younger, C. Jones, T. McMahon

The Work Session was called to order at approximately 6:57 pm.

Managing Director's Report & Council Staff Report

Managing Director's report was distributed to the members of Council and the Council Staff report was attached to the Work Session agenda.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz clarified that the fireworks display at the Pagoda on New Year's Eve is being funded by Berks Festival Inc. She stated that the Pagoda will be open and that because of the sponsorship of Adams and Associates the City is not underwriting any major costs.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz publicly thanked the Blighted Property Review Committee for their work. She described the amazing transformation of the 1400 block of Fairview St. She stated that a blighted property has been renovated and a new family has moved in. She stated that she is proud of the work of the City and that this property is now in beautiful condition and an asset to the neighborhood.

Recommendations of the Redistricting Committee

Mel Jacobson, Dan Gallagher, William Seidel and Mike Golumbiewski were in attendance regarding this topic.

Mr. Spencer explained the need for the examination of Council districts after each Census year. He stated that there may be changes to Council districts. This item will appear on a Council agenda in the near future.

John Kromer arrived at this time.

Mr. Jacobson thanked Council for the opportunity to serve and also thanked Mr. Golumbiewski for his research and assistance. He stated that the Committee is

unanimous on this proposal and that redistricting is in order. He stated that the Committee considered contiguous neighborhoods, the percentage of population per district and the proportion of Hispanic population per district.

Mr. Jacobson reviewed the proposed changes and the net gains/losses of each district. He stated that the Committee is happy with these results and noted that no wards were separated. There is no need to change the District 5 boundaries.

Mr. Acosta questioned how long Council had to act if they choose not to enact this proposal. Mr. Younger stated that he was unsure and would need to report back. Mr. Jacobson noted his understanding that Council has 45 days to enact the changes if they are agreeable. He noted the need for a public hearing to be held within the 45 days. He also stated that Council can choose to do nothing or propose their own changes.

Mr. Spencer suggested discussing this at the December 27 Committee of the Whole. He noted the need to schedule a public hearing.

Ms. Reed stated that this proposal has been well thought out. She asked Council to remember that no significant changes were made in the past as the 2000 census figures did not reflect major changes. She noted that now there is need for change. She expressed her thanks to the Committee and her gratitude that gerrymandering did not occur.

Mr. Sterner expressed his thanks to the Committee and stated that they did an outstanding job. He stated that he would like to assume Precinct 9-5 since it is contiguous with his other neighborhoods and that he is pleased with the plan.

Mr. Acosta expressed his thanks to the Committee but noted that he does not like losing 4-1 and 5-1. He stated that losing Penn St is problematic and that he is already hearing from constituents who are worried that this will occur.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed her thanks to the Committee. She commended them for having better diligence than the State. She stated that she never felt that Precinct 9-5 belonged in District 2 and that Penns Commons was split. She stated that Precinct 3-1 was always awkward in placement. She questioned when the changes would take effect. Mr. Younger stated that they would take effect immediately after enacted by Council.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that it is important for citizens to know that the

boundaries are changing.

Mr. Waltman stated that this proposal is a good one. He commended the Committee for their work. He stated that they looked at the issue seriously and came up with a good plan. He noted his understanding of Mr. Acosta's concern regarding Penn St.

Mr. Acosta noted that the inclusion of Penn St balances District 1. He again noted his objection with losing Precincts 4-1 and 5-1. Mr. Jacobson stated that many times the problem is that wards divide in the middle of streets and neighborhoods are dissected.

Mr. Marmarou expressed his thanks to the Committee. He noted his agreement with the movement of Precinct 13-1 and that population was the impetus for the changes and not geography. He noted the problems that occurred when the County Elections Office proposed changes to polling locations in his Council District.

Mr. Spencer stated that this will be a discussion topic at the December 27 Committee of the Whole and that the public will also have the opportunity to speak on this topic at the regular meeting and public hearing.

Ms. Reed noted the need to draft the ordinance and introduce it at the first meeting in January to avoid its layover period crossing the fiscal year.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that this may also affect the reorganization of Council as Council District boundaries are changing.

Mr. Spencer stated that the ordinance will be introduced at the January 9, 2012 meeting.

Presentation of Olivet Project in Pendora Park

Jeff Palmer and Lee Olsen were in attendance regarding this topic.

Mr. Olsen reviewed the concept plan and stated that there will be a building with a gymnasium and locker rooms and a building with office space and activity rooms. He stated that there will be parking for 20 cars at each end of the building. He stated that the existing pavilion is in good condition and will be moved closer to the fieldhouse.

Mr. Olsen stated that two public meetings were held at Pendora regarding the project. He stated that there were many concerns that the building would not fit into the park setting. He stated that the building will have a patio and that curbs and sidewalks will be installed. The entire size of the project is approximately 58,185 square feet which is

slightly larger than one acre.

Mr. Palmer stated that the programming which will be available will be similar to that offered at the other Olivet sites. He stated that Olivet stresses academic success (82% of Olivet members graduate from high school), character building and wellness. He noted the need for the programming to be fun and well-rounded.

Mr. Palmer noted the great need for programming in this section of Reading and that this is a window of opportunity. He noted the need for Council to take action before the close of 2011 in order to begin the capital campaign. He stated that this is a \$2 million project and is the centerpiece of the capital campaign. He noted his appreciation of Council's support of the project.

Mr. Sterner noted his appreciation for Mr. Palmer's patience through the project. He stated that Council saw this presentation in the past and noted the need for a decision. He stated that Council has seen a draft of the lease agreement and this is the last piece of action needed by Council.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the number of seats in the gym. Mr. Palmer stated that it will be a small set of bleachers to seat 50 – 60 people. He noted that this facility is not for large crowds and that 40 parking spaces may be overkill. He stated that most club members walk and there will be 3-4 staff on site.

Mr. Olsen noted the need to fine tune the design after the results of the capital campaign are known. He stated that the footprint may become smaller. He also noted that the review by the Planning Commission may alter the final design. He reiterated that this is a concept design, not final design.

Mr. Marmarou expressed his pleasure that the seating was not for too many people. He stated that this would encourage too many outsiders in the neighborhood.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked Olivet for working closely with the community. She stated that many community concerns have been addressed and that she understands that the youth and community need support. She stated that this would be a wonderful holiday gift to give the residents of East Reading.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the concept design respects the park topography. She stated that an inn was located in this area in the past. She stated that the new building should respect the neighbors and the history of the park. She stated that this

project has much potential and noted the need to continue working together. She requested that Council members clearly review the draft lease agreement and address the issue at the December 27 meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the ball field and fieldhouse are not included in the lease agreement. She noted her hope that Olivet can work with the Recreation Commission to coordinate events and programming at Pendora.

Ms. Reed stated that she was able to locate photographs of this area which show the inn. She stated that it was also a trolley stop.

Mr. McMahon suggested that the building include an area to display the history of the park. He noted that the Administration supports this project 100% and that it is a great opportunity for the City.

Mr. Waltman noted that this park is used heavily. He stated that this is a great opportunity and investment in this neighborhood. He noted that it is time to move the project forward.

Mr. Acosta noted the need for a legal review of the lease agreement.

Mr. Palmer expressed his gratitude to Mr. Olsen for his work on the project. Mr. Olsen stated that it has been a policy of his company to assist non-profits to be good corporate citizens.

Mr. Spencer questioned if the plans were to scale. Mr. Olsen stated that they are.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the new location of the pavilion will be at the location of the current stage/former concession stand area. She noted the need for neighbors to assist with setting the course of use of the fieldhouse. She stated that stone from the former prison was used to construct the fieldhouse. Mr. Olsen stated that the fieldhouse is gorgeous and has been well preserved.

Mr. Waltman questioned the removal of trees. Mr. Olsen stated that some of the trees by the bluff will need to be removed. He noted his willingness to replace each tree that is removed. He expressed his belief that only 2-3 trees would need to be relocated.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Pendora had many trees that suffered during the latest storm.

Downtown 20/20 Report

Brian Smith and Krista Schneider from Barry Isett were in attendance regarding this topic.

Mr. Olsen gave a brief background on this project and stated that he serves on the steering committee. He stated that a master plan is being developed.

Mr. Jones stated that the master plan would also include Franklin St, traffic flow, pedestrian flow and the character of the neighborhood. The Barry Isett agency is overseeing the project of a one block pilot area in the 500 block of Franklin St. Plans are being developed for this project and are almost ready to go out to bid. He noted the PennDOT approval will also be needed as Franklin St is a State road.

Mr. Olsen stated that 2-3 public meetings will be held over the next 60 days regarding the content of the master plan. He stated that the master plan will be revised as necessary after hearing public comment and another presentation will be made to Council.

Mr. Smith stated that it has been a pleasure working with Reading. He stated that this has been a unique study and will be a unique and challenging opportunity.

Ms. Schneider stated that she studied the history of downtown Reading.

Mr. Smith and Ms. Schneider reviewed the concepts included in the master plan. The main initiatives in the draft plan are two markets on Penn St on either side of a traffic circle at 5th & Penn. The circle would become a true roundabout and assist with vehicle traffic flow.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz complimented the work of Mr. Smith and Ms. Schneider. She stated that she works downtown and does not shop downtown as the stores do not meet her needs. She noted the need to address the stores that are located downtown and those that do not encourage pedestrian traffic should be relocated.

Mr. Acosta stated that tattoo parlors and pawn shops do not encourage pedestrian traffic and are not appropriate in historical settings. He noted the need to reprogram the area to change people's perception.

Mr. Jones stated that one market building could be constructed and the second added

after the first one is full.

Mr. Waltman stated that this plan does not appear to address some items. He noted that empty spaces can be used to leverage creativity. He also noted the need to address initiatives at the riverfront. He noted his hope that 6-7 initiatives begin concurrently to feed each other and phase the others in. He noted the need to include the arts. He stated that there is huge opportunity.

Mr. McMahon stated that the current market location could be moved to this area. He also suggested that the market buildings be open air to begin the project.

Mr. Waltman noted the need to prevent bottleneck traffic. He stated that there are times when traffic needs to flow quickly out of the downtown area. Ms. Schneider stated that these projects cannot be phased in as they depend on the pedestrian traffic. She stated that vehicle traffic flow is second to pedestrian traffic flow in urban planning. She stated that the projects must occur simultaneously.

Mr. Acosta noted that the current planted islands along Penn St do not make pedestrians feel welcome. He suggested that traffic be blocked completely in this area for special events. Ms. Schneider stated that for mixed uses more retail is needed. She stated that this is not conducive at this time.

Ms. Reed stated that she has lots of questions. She stated that she is glad this draft plan is a reinvention and is adapted urban planning. She stated her understanding of the need for pedestrian friendly areas. She questioned what portion of the plan would be completed first and the funds that would be available. Ms. Schneider stated that the reconfiguration of the traffic flow would occur first. She stated that other events can be scheduled in the open air and vending carts could be used while the market buildings are constructed.

Mr. Waltman stated that the market is one of many possibilities. He noted the need to be successful while events occur. Mr. Geffken stated that the Recovery Plan calls for an Economic Development Strategy which will include a Mercado and vending carts. He stated that Reading needs an identifiable center city and open air market. He suggested that the project begin with these items and expand as able. He stated that the Economic Development Strategy also includes a business incubator which will fit well into this plan.

Mr. Kromer stated that the Economic Development Strategy will help address these

issues. He also noted the need to add café tables at downtown restaurants.

Mr. Waltman agreed with Mr. Kromer. He noted the need for the City to have a vision of what it wants to become. He expressed his belief that the market alone will not be successful.

Mr. Smith stated that the draft plan also includes other initiatives that were not reviewed this evening, such as a railroad museum.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has worked downtown for many years. She stated that she cannot shop here as there is nothing practical that she would purchase. She noted the need to acknowledge the use of businesses who are contemplating locating downtown. She stated that there is much potential for business.

Ms. Reed expressed the belief that the streetscape should begin the process.

Mr. Acosta noted the need for political will to bring the vision to reality. He noted the need for the City to be branded and that there are some businesses that do not belong on this corridor. He noted the need to encourage these businesses to relocate.

Mr. Smith noted the need for Reading not to recreate West Reading but to have its own identity.

Mr. McMahon questioned the cost estimate. Mr. Smith stated that this has not been considered.

Mr. Acosta thanked Mr. Smith and Ms. Schneider for their plan. He stated that it is good to have a window to the future. He stated that the City may need to delay the start of the projects due to its financial condition but that he is willing to move forward.

Mr. Jones stated that there is currently no funding for these types of projects but that having the master plan would poise the City to receive them when they are available. Mr. Geffken stated that the project in the 500 block of Franklin St is included in the 2012 budget.

Mr. Spencer expressed his thanks for the work done and noted the need to create an atmosphere people want to visit.

The Work Session adjourned at approximately 9:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk